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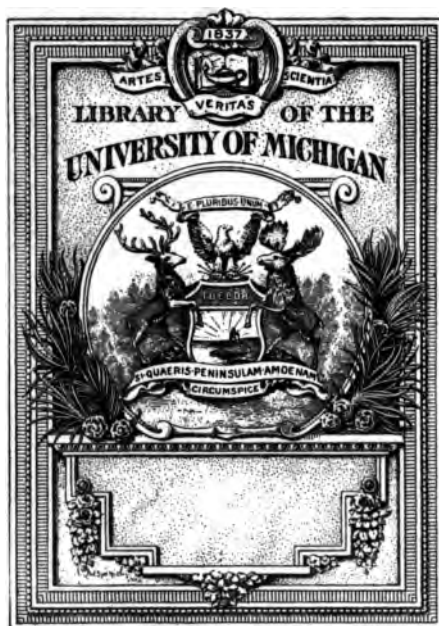
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The
Lincoln Book of Poems

WILLIAM L. STIDGER



2000

THE LINCOLN BOOK OF POEMS

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WILLIAM L. ^{Roy} STIDGER



BOSTON
RICHARD G. BADGER
THE GORHAM PRESS
1911

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THE GORHAM PRESS BOSTON, U. S.

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LINCOLN'S HEART AN AEOLIAN HARP

Open to the gentle touch of every tiny breeze
That drifts along the river o'er the fields and trees;
Atune to every breath of wind that wavers on the
 hill,
A breath of harmony and song, that breaths above
 the rill.
Aeolian Harp of highly tempered, vibrant strings;
Aeolian Harp that whispers, cries, and laughs, and
 sings
Athrough the sunny day, and through the wind
 tossed night;
An answering chord of sympathy to every breath—
 or dark or light!

Open, his heart to every gentle touch of every tiny
 pain
That came into the childish heart when baby hopes
 were slain;
Atune to every cruel hurt that moaned athrough the
 land,
A soothing touch beside white cots, of rough yet
 gentle hand;
Aeolian Harp of highly tempered, vibrant strings
Responding quick to all the pain of bitter things
That came to weary hearts; with joy responding to
 the breeze
Of joy that played in laughter in and out among the
 happy leaves.
And then in turn wept bitter tears with every
 Mother's pain,
Because of brother, father, son, in cruel battle slain.
Ah, Harp atune to every wind that blows along
 the hill;
Ah, Heart that vibrates to the pulse of every hu-
 man ill!

HAPPY WHEN OTHERS WERE HAPPY SORRY WHEN OTHERS WERE SAD

"Nothing would make me more miserable than to believe you miserable, nothing more happy than to know you were so." Lincoln, in a letter written to Miss Mary Owens, August 16th, 1837. Springfield, Ill.

Happy when others were happy,
Sorry when others were sad;
Such was the love of his great true heart,
Such was the soul that he had!

Smiled with the boy at his playtime,
Laughed with his brave soldier men;
Stories of fun and of frolic
Rang through the camping place, when
Lincoln with tender heart journeyed that way.
Loud rang the mirth and the laughter,
Droll was the wit and the story that day.

Happy when others were happy,
Sorry when others were sad;
Such was the love of his great true heart,
Such was the soul that he had!

Boy on the night watch is sleeping,
Homesick, and weary worn lad;
Mother comes, broken, and weeping,
Pleading, and yearning and sad;
Finds a great heart full of pity,
Finds a sad head bended low.
Out of that room full of gladness
With tear bedimmed eyes see her go!

Happy when others were happy,
Sorry when others were sad;
Such was the love of his great true heart,
Such was the soul that he had!

JUST BE KIND

"After all, the one meaning of life is simply to be kind." Lincoln.

Never Seer of any age has told the world
Truth more tender, more eternal;
No philosopher of might has ever hurled
Across the far flung reaches of the years
Truth more virile, truth more pregnant
With promise born of the eternal Christ himself;
Born of suffering, and pain, and tears;
Promised hope to all the world of human kind;—
Easing of the wearing world old fears;
And yet, 'tis only this, just to be kind, to be kind!

Universal language, though unspoken, of mankind;
Understood instinctively by beast as well as man;
Whether here in halls of learning or in yonder
slough we find
Him groveling in the worm fed slime, and dirt,
and mire,
Seeing him, nor blue spread stretch above, nor God-
like heart of love;
Understood by worshipper of wind, or earth, or
fire;
Wise or foolish, high or lowly; all will understand;
All the world of throbbing, breathing, living kind!
If you'll do only this: just to be kind, to be kind!

WHERE THERE GREW A THISTLE

"I have not done much, but this I have done—
wherever I have found a thistle growing I have
tried to pluck it up, and in its place I have planted
a flower."—Lincoln.

Ah Lincoln, many a flower of joy and hope
You planted where the thistles grew
In weary hearts that beat in bitter pain,
Nor pity, love, nor comfort knew;
Until YOU came that way with open hand
And scattered seeds of flowers in the sand.

Full many a little child with tear stained face
Could point with pride and joy along the way
Where erst while was a stony, stumbling place
That you smoothed o'er one stormy, dismal day,
And earthed the seed of wondrous, Fairy Flowers,
Which eased the tears and gilded sweet, the hours.

And many, many soldiers boys in stress and pain,
Aweep for lack of love, and tender care,
Have learned to breath with reverence your name,
Because, along their thorny pathways there
You planted seeds of love that bloomed, to be
Flowers of peace, and rest, and sweet beauty.

And, Mothers too, will long remember you,
Because, along their weary road of life
Where cruel thorns, and thistles grew,
You rendered sweeter far the bitter strife
Of war, and death, by sowing seeds, and dropping
tears
That flowers of pity still might bloom along those
years.

Teach us, Oh kindly man, of Kingly heart
To stifle all the thistles and the thorns;
To play, with Thine own sweetness, well our part
In life's sad drama, though our way be drear
As yours was once; and help us keep aback the tears
By planting seeds of flowers everywhere we go;
As you, by leaving flowers of love, where thistles
grow!

"ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF"

"I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined with defeat". Spoken by Lincoln in his first public address at Salem, March 9th, 1832.

A little lad he was when first he knew the pain of
grief;

'Mother's little Soldier, comrade, Mother's little
Man'

She called him, sounding deep, as only Mothers can
His childish heart, unearthing qualities that seemed
beyond belief.

Warm, and sweet was that dear comradeship, as
Summer sun

Through nine ambitious, reaching years of tender,
sweet boyhood—

When suddenly, a morning, bleak and drear, broke
o'er his little world

And God had taken from his life that understanding
one.

Ah yes, he knew what disappointment meant;
His was a life with deepest sorrow blent!

In early manhood's breaking dawn he felt again that
thrust of pain.

Comrade was she, dear and tender flower of woman-
hood,

Who came, and soothed, and loved, and ever un-
derstood.

His hopes had world wide grown since down his
rugged path she came!

Tender, deep, was that dear comradeship, as brood-
ing stream

When Summer winds of Southland play along its
flowered way.

Then suddenly, black clouds drove back the glory
of that day,
And she was gone from him;—alone he stood, shattered his dream.

Ah yes, he knew what disappointment meant;
His was a life with deepest sorrow blent!

A little lad with happy face to cheer a lonely Father heart
Came to him in the wearied years of that long, cruel, bitter strife
Of war, and pain, when sorrow brooded o'er his saddened life.
Alone he stood from all the world, save that one little soul, apart.
Close, and sad was that dear comradeship, as Autumn days
Are dear to hearts that weep, and souls that live in loneliness.
But suddenly his great heart fills with saddened pain and stress—
The little lad is gone;—Ah lonely man, who walks in lonely ways!

Ah yes, he knew what disappointment meant;
His was a life with deepest sorrow blent!

THE HUMBLE WALK OF LIFE

"I was born, and have ever remained, in the most humble walks of life". Spoken by Lincoln in his first address to the people of Sangamon County, Salem, Ill., on the 9th of March, 1832. His first public address.

Yes, Lincoln, you have walked the humble walks of life;
You have known the way of pain, and bitter strife;
Sprang you from dear Mother Earth, her noble son,
And Man of Might, with soul triumphant, stalwart one!

Yes, Lincoln, common ways have known your mighty tread;
Humble paths o'er which your strident foot-falls led;
But you have given glory to the poor man's weary load,
The pack the humble man bears down life's common road!

The common man is King of All men living now,
since
You have trod the common path with princely reverence,
And we have learned to love the common man the more
Because you, Lincoln, trod that Holy way before!

THAT WONDROUS NAME!

"I cannot but know what you all know, that without a name, perhaps without a reason why I should have a name, there has fallen upon me a task such as did not even rest upon the Father of his country." From an address to the legislature of Ohio, Feb. 13th, 1861.

"Lincoln", name that men now speak with reverent
 hearts,

'Tis true, was once unknown, unsought, unfamed
Of men, unspoken in the far spread, untilled parts
Of his own land, a great eternal soul unnamed
By human ken, yet christened well by an eternal
 hand

To raise a sunken race, and save his native land!

"Lincoln", name that all the world has come to
 know;

Name that all men speak with piteous, tender touch,
Because he knew the way of thorny paths to go;
Because, like million weary souls, he suffered much!
Because, like Christ of Calvary, he loved all those
Who suffered pain, as one, who, suffering knows!

"Lincoln", name that shall be whispered down
The murmuring corridors of changing years,
And centuries that, whirling, come and go;
Name that gathers 'round it hallowed mist of tears;
Name that centuries will cut like glacial grooves
Deep in the breast of time, the coming worlds to
 move!

"WITH HIM I CANNOT FAIL"

"Without the assistance of that Divine Being I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well." Lincoln.

What Faith, what Trust, what Hope was yours
Ah, Man of Might, of stalwart strength!
Your faith unhemmed by swinging doors
Of minster, church, or stately length
Of steeple spire; by creed, or race;
But in the Eternal's ever kindly grace
You trusted, knowing that you could not fail!

What confidence that held you strong
All through the blackened, dreary night
Of war, so gruelling, so bitter, and so long?
What deeper insight made you know the right
When all your world was saying you were wrong,
And cruel cries of hate came from the countless
throng?
Ah, it was because you trusted God, and knew you
could not fail!

What love was it that kept you kindly sweet
When your own life was touched with sorrow's
sear?
And all the world that seemed to you most meet
Grew black; when she that seemed to you most dear
Was gone, and sorrow deeply hovered over you?
How was it that you held you nobly true?
Ah, it was because you trusted, knowing that HE
would not fail!

THE PURE THREAD

Into the strong man's life there came
At this time, one whose softening touch
Upon his rugged life had much
To do with all his tender fame.

Ann Rutledge was the daughter of
An old romantic southern home
Where often in the southern gloam
She dreamed her dream of future love.

When Lincoln met her first she seemed
A simple Rose touched, timid maid,
A Fairy of the dale and glade,
Unspoiled, unblighted as she dreamed.

All who knew her loved her, when
They saw the beauty of her soul.
And e'en to-day great tear drops roll
From eyes of those who knew her then.

Strong Lincoln learned to love her with
Such love as lasts beyond the years;
A love untouched of hurt or fears;
A love but such as great souls give!

Into life's motely fabric he
Was weaving one pure thread of love
To bind his heart to God above,
And link his soul eternally!

THAT SACRED HOUR

("Lincoln was sent for and spent one hour with Ann Rutledge before she died.") Ida M. Tarbell.

For you and me to pry into that chamber there,
Where she was lying, pale and weak, with golden
hair

About her face, and eyes of love once more full
bright

When he came in, at last, for all to say 'Good-
Night';

Would be the direst sacrilege, though deep our
love!

Just two that scene was for,—and God above!

One hour alone with her, one anguished hour he
spent;

No human eye to see his pain, no comfort, save the
heaven lent

Its sunshine creeping through the open door to light
her dying face;

A symbol of the light that was for her beyond the
bode of human place.

No spoken word from that sad hour has yet been
told mankind;

But see the piteous man who stumbles out, broken
groping, blind!

U O P M

FLOW GENTLY NOW, SWEET SANGAMON

(The Sangamon is the river beside which Lincoln and Ann Rutledge used to wander in their love days, and beside which Ann Rutledge is now buried.)

Sweet Sangamon flow gently now,
For she sleeps here, her whitened brow
And slender form relaxed in rest,
Her grave in flowered splendor dressed.
Flow gently now, it does not seem
That she is dead, but just adream
Beside Thy softly flowing stream.

Flow silently, sweet Sangamon,
While evening shadows creep along
The pathways leading to her grave,
Where gentle breezes waft and wave.
Flow gently now, it does not seem
That she is dead, but just adream
Beside Thy softly flowing stream.

Speak softly, O sweet Sangamon,
Do not disturb that saddened one;
That 'Man of Sorrows' kneeling there
Amid the evening's hallowed air.
Just whisper now; it does not seem
That she is dead, but just adream
Beside Thy softly flowing stream.

Far from this scene flow on, flow on
To other lands sweet Sangamon,
But ne'er forget that Thou hast seen
This grave of love, this spot of green!
Flow gently then, sweet Sangamon
To other lands flow on, flow on,
And tell the world it does not seem
That she is dead, but just adream
Beside Thy softly flowing stream.

THE SANGAMON'S GLORY

Ah, Sangamon awind among the little hills,
Full fed by many bursting brooks, and tumbling
rills,
Until Thy widening, wandering bed
Through broadening, flowered banks of green is led!

What beauties here of hill, and wood, and field;
Of grasses soft, and flowers, many hued, Thy path-
ways yield!

What waters clear, and shadowing myriad leaves
Are fluttering in Thy darkened depth where
spreading trees

Bend over Thee to touch Thy breast with finger
tips of love!

What massive, fleeting banks of snowy clouds above
Are mirrored in Thy passive, dreaming, beauteous
eyes!

What fire of red, and purpled evening's darkened
skies

At times seem resting on Thy Mother breast,
As day-light sinks to night below the wolding west!

And yet, Oh Sangamon of beauteous, wondrous
mein,

To lingering, loving, memory haunted lovers it
would seem

That Thou art glorious, not because of these
Thy flowers, shadowed leaves, and bending trees;
Thy banks of green enclosing tender mother breast;
Nor yet because of Thy reflected beauties o' the
west;

But Thou art wondrous, more, O haunted stream
Because, upon Thy banks THEY dreamed their
dream

Of love, of home to be, of hope the future held
When their two lives the coming years would weld
To one great heart; and thus, they, wandering,
talked

Of love, and home, as down thy winding, flowered
paths they walked
At evening time amid the scented days of balmy
June,
When love, and flowers were bursting into living
bloom,
And birds were mating in the new massed bowers
of leaves,
And throbbing songs were bursting from Thy
spreading trees!

'Twas on this very spot of green they stood;
They wandered hand in hand athrough this very
wood;
Aye, over these same hills at sunset time they
strolled
And stalwart Lincoln breathed into her heart the
story old
Of love, and hope, and home, while blushing wo-
manhood
In all its purity, with lowered eyes all meekly stood
Beside the noble man; Ann Rutledge, daughter of
a Southern home,
Woman of tenderness, cheeks of Roses yet unblown;
Tears of joy, pulse of stirring dawn;—just here,
Perhaps upon this very knoll, full many a year
Ago, this love, that all the world has known
Was born, amid the subtle charm of evening's shad-
owed gloam.

Because of that, O Sangamon, O beauteous stream
We tread Thy sacred paths with footsteps reverent,
And glory in Thy many flashing, shimmering
gleams
Of light,—but walk with prayer, our heads in love
full bent,
Because THEY walked these woodland, cloistered
halls,
So shall we walk this day amid Thy myriad memory
calls!

AT THE GRAVE OF ANN RUTLEDGE

(The grave of Ann Rutledge is marked by a simple stone, with name, and date of birth and death carved on it.)

"Ann Rutledge", just a simple stone,
Half buried in the slender grass.
That name alone
Carved with unskilled hand
To mark the resting place
Of that fair Southland Flower,
Which bloomed in tender grace
Along a strong man's sunless bower,
To touch to sweetness for awhile
A sad man's rugged life
With summer sun, and smile;
And then to die at Autumn time,
And leave his world all desolate
With hopelessness, and sad repine,
As fades the flower on the hill,
Or dies the Warbler's summer trill.

"Ann Rutledge", just a simple stone
That rests beneath a clump of trees;
From other graves apart, alone;
Where scented drifts of summer breeze
Come softly stirring o' the leaves
Of grass, all whispering her
Of love now known in every wold,
With all its pity, tenderness, and blur
Of mist that falls the while
Where'er that tear touched, tender tale is told.

"Ann Rutledge",—no monument to mark
Your last earth resting place;
No granite shaft towers to the sky
In tall majestic grace—,
But e'er for you, the breezes sigh
And breathe above a simple stone.
More fitting that for your sweet life!
Itself untouched of bitter strife;
Of envy's forward clutch for fame
To crown a king and win him fame;
No Cleopatra's wiles were yours;
No Helen's Troy e'er op'ed its doors
That you might enter robed in gold;
No Guinevere a king's life sold;
For you were but a tender child of
Goodness, and of light,
Foreordained to gleam the night
Of greater king than story holds,
Or history's great page unfolds;
Your king, a king of greater worth
Than all the rulers of the earth!

"Ann Rutledge", and no other mark
To tell the world your tender fame.
Above your rest there sings a Lark;
About your life, about your name
The glory of unopened flowers
Lingers in the twilight hours,
Suggesting in their sweet perfume
The morning promise of the noon;
A promise that the wonder Will
Of God hushed, e'er it found fulfill.
And yet the sweetness of your life
We see in that great saddened man,
For your dear touch to him was more
Than ever king has felt before!
Ah, sad thought: You ne'er saw him, when
He wore his country's diadem
Of Love, and Faith, and Willing Trust
For like his own great life's dear hope,
Your's ended e'er the bud was broke!

"I CANNOT FORGET"

(From a scene in Lincoln's life as taken from Ida M. Tarbell's History of Lincoln.)

How many tired, broken hearts have sent that bitter
cry
Throbbing out into the night against a blackened
sky!

How many hearts have suffered too, that could not
e'er forget!

How many souls though long apart are longing,
longing yet!

How many eyes have peered out through the rain
and snow at night

With vision dimmed and dying soul all seared with
bitter blight!

How many arms have upward reached as though
the loved one there

Would come with gentle breath at night from out
the evening air!

How many eyes have filled with tears, adream
athrough the drifting years;

How many, many lips have cried; how many, many
souls have died,

Because, brave souls, their tender hearts could not
forget!

BESIDE WHITE COTS

See that rugged man there, kneeling
Down beside that wounded boy,
With a word of subtle healing,
Tender word of love and joy!
Who is that kingly one?
'Tis the great, and kind Lincoln!

Reaching out his big rough hands
Touching gently, fevered brow;
(All the sorrow in the land
Makes his great soul tender now!)
Who is that kindly one?
'Tis the tender man, Lincoln!

Smoothing back the ruffled hair,
Holding close the pain clenched palms,
Breathing words of holy prayer,
Sweetly reading comfort psalms.
Who is that kindly one?
'Tis the reverent Lincoln!

See him bending low his head
Where that soldier breathes his last,
Kneeling down beside the bed,
Tears are falling free and fast.
Who is that kindly one?
'Tis the saddened man, Lincoln!

LINCOLN'S GETHSEMANE

The night was gloom, the city streets were bare and
lone.

The war was cruel with blood of slain, and many a
home

Was dark that night for lack of music, lack of song,
And no laugh rang out through the darkened gloam,
As that tall, sad faced person passed the streets
along.

A row of empty houses, cheerless, with unlighted
fires

He passes as he walks along with deep, untold de-
sires

To end the war; but even then his human heart
can hear the call

Of God to fight the battle through though deep the
pall.

Then out along the fields amid the lowering night
he roams

Amid the hurt of soul, the slain of life, the deepen-
ing gloams!

And kneeling there beside a rugged storm flung
rock

Which many centuries had scorned the sweeping
shock;

He lifted up his weary soul, helpless, to God above;

A soul all torn with doubt, and hurt, and Univer-
sal Love;

And cried: "Oh what am I, my God that Thou
should'st bid me go

To further ends! Oh, what am I, that Thou
should'st trust me so?"

THE FACE OF LINCOLN

That massive head is raised unto the sky;
A pleading look, a piteous, broken cry
Goes up to God; a cry of soul torn pain
For all the weary, broken hearted, and the slain.

And now the head is bowed in great humility
While deepening lines of care, and world pity
Furrow heavy lines in that brave, manly brow.
Enough, sad heart, Thy soul to crush, Thy head
to bow!

Cheeks hollow, sunken with the awful strain
Of midnight vigils filled with anxious pain;
Lips all aquiver, ever nigh to sympathetic tears
Through all those weary, gloomy, saddened years.

Eyes, Ah, 'tis here the hurt, within their depths,
shows most!

For here the bitter sadness of a sorrowing host
Of suffering, yearning, crying, hungering souls,
That, deep within that mighty heart of love he
holds,

Broods in those haunted, sleepless, wondering eyes,
Like Autumn's sorrow for the dying leaves, which
gloams the skies;

Where all the sadness of a Nation's myriad pain,
And all the travail of a thousand mothers' slain
Is buried deep within their piteous, brooding sweep!
Ah, eyes that yearn, and eyes that turn to God, and
eyes that weep!

**"FATHER ABRAHAM" THEY CALLED
HIM**

"Father Abraham" they called him,
Spake it softly, spake it low,
With a touch of sacred feeling—
All his soldiers spake it so.

When the battle's smoke was rolling,
When the maimed were lying low,
"Father Abraham" they spake it,—
Spake it tenderly, and low.

'Round the Camp Fires in the even,
When his "Boys" all tenderly
Sang their songs of home, and mother;
With the tear drops falling free,
Always sang they of another,
"Father Abraham", 'twas he!

"Father Abraham", from white cots
Spoken softly, with a gleam
Of hope, and joy, and tender thoughts,
From the dying breasts of men that seemed
Nearer heaven than the earth;
Place of pain where seemed a dirth
Of tender hands, and tears, and words to pray,
'Till "Father Abraham" passed that way.

THE PATH HE TROD—THE PATH OF THE HILL

Two pathways wind the varied tread of life
That men may take: adown the meadowed stream
Beside the murmuring river where the strife
Of battle sounds but dim, like echoing dream
That is so far away it seems a fairy tale,
And not a bloody truth that turns men pale!
Adown this flowered way are softened beds of
green
Where one may storied tales and poems glean.

The other pathway leads across a barren hill
All seared with many a pain and human ill;
Where grass is burned to black beneath the manly
tread
Of many thousand souls along that pathway dead!
The petals of the flowers are crisp and dried;
Beneath the burdened pain of war the fair have
died!
A weary traveler climbs with faltering pain
That path of gloom where loyal hearts are slain!

Two men have trod this barren, pain swept hill
In sacrifice for sin and human ill.
Fire blanched the winding way that path must lead;
The hearts of men who go its weary way must
bleed!
Because, where ends the path, far trod, and high
A cross stands bare, outlined against the lonely sky!

HIS ENTRANCE TO FORD'S THEATRE

Ford's Theatre in Washington this night
Is filled with people e'er the shadow light
Of evening has died from out the west.
And many a laugh, and many a jest
Rings out from many happy hearts,
From stately hall, from street, and marts.

When Lincoln enters that great hall
With many a shout and many a call
Of joy and pride, and love, they all arise
And ringing cheers reach to the skies!
Then tender hearted Lincoln stands
And reaches out his great rough hands—
In blessing, waves them o'er their heads,
While through his mind with muffled treads
His "Boys" in blue pass by, and tears
Of sorrow trickle down each cheek.
He waves his hand—he cannot speak!

Ah, Lincoln, you have suffered much!
But now it seems, within your touch
Is all that you have hungered for
Through all the sad, and bitter war;
The hope of all your life it seems;
The fulfillment of all your dreams;—
But tragedy of tragedies!
Within the moment of your peace
You are within the traitor's touch!
Ah, Lincoln, you have suffered much!

THE STORM AND THE CALM

For a moment the silence of death reigns in that
building, vast;
But as the truth is realized, a cry of vengeance rends
the skies,
And never was a scene more awful than that thund-
ering blast
Of passionate and shrieking hate, and wilder, cruel
cries
Of "Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!" throbbing from
the many breasts;
A storm of hate, and vengeance, throbbing, lung-
ing, plunging to its crest!

What a contrast with that howling storm without,
is there
Within the chamber where the martyred Lincoln
lies, and where
A solemn hush has fallen o'er the great men gath-
ered in the room
Where breathes the pale, unconscious form athrough
the long night's silent gloom.
At last the day light breaks above the country's
saddened east
While calmness sweet, spreads o'er his pale and
wrinkled face, in peace
Eternal, and the Modern Man of Sorrows passes
to his rest.

